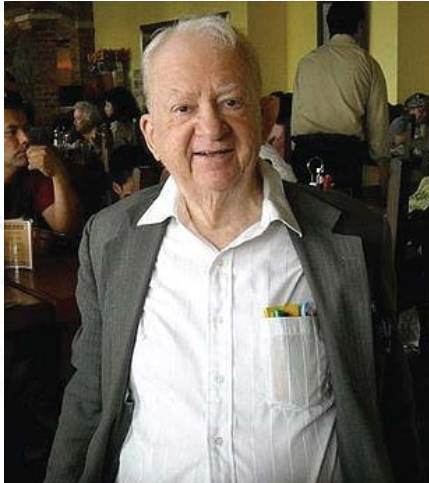


# A legacy of Diplomacy



Allan B. Calhamer in 2011

**T**o describe Allan B. Calhamer's journey to his career as a letter carrier in suburban Chicago as unusual would understate the matter.

Consider just a few of the things this Oak Brook, IL Branch 825 member—who died on Feb. 25 at age 81—accomplished before he picked up his first satchel in La Grange Park in his 40s:

—He went to Harvard University on a scholarship and studied history, graduating *cum laude* in 1953, before enrolling in Harvard Law School.

—He took the Foreign Service exam and then applied his mathematical wizardry to military research at a research laboratory in Massachusetts.

—In his spare time, he invented a game—Diplomacy—that gained worldwide popularity, counted President John F. Kennedy and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger among its devotees, and was named by *Games* magazine to its hall of fame, joining such iconic games as Scrabble, Monopoly and Clue.

—He moved to New York in the 1960s and sought work as a computer programmer. But he was a decade (or more) ahead of his time, so he made a living as a guard at the Statue of Liberty.

In the Big Apple, this son of an engineer and a schoolteacher met his future wife, Hilda, a native of the Dominican Republic. He headed back to his native Illinois and a steady, reliable job—as a letter carrier. This was a couple of years after the Great Postal Strike of 1970 had made delivering the mail a middle-class job.

“It paid relatively well, it had good benefits, it was stable,” his older daughter, Tatiana, told *The Postal Record*. “He had a wife, my mom was expecting me, they had my sister the next year, and he had a family to support.”

Tatiana lives in Elgin, west of Chicago, where she works—a love of books having been transmitted from her fa-

ther—as a public librarian. Her younger sister, Selenne, is a financial adviser in Chicago. Their mother remains in the family home in La Grange Park.

The lanky, 6-foot-4 Calhamer surely offered an intriguing presence as he strode along the eight miles on his route.

“He would look at license plates and figure out the prime factors, so it kept his mind sharp,” Tatiana said. “And he’d look at house numbers and figure out what was interesting about the number: ‘Oh, that one is 13 squared.’ ”

His customers also were a source of joy, Tatiana noted.

“He enjoyed talking with people. He would learn their stories. La Grange Park is a small, closely connected community, so everybody knows everybody or knows about everybody. He delivered mail to the father of one of my high school teachers. It was neat that my dad was the mailman. He hooked me up with my first piano teacher because she was on his mail route.”

The early hours were a plus, his daughter said.

“It gave him time to pursue other interests outside of work. He loved to paint, he loved to read—he read a lot of history, a lot of sociology—he loved to play chess and play Go, a Japanese game.”

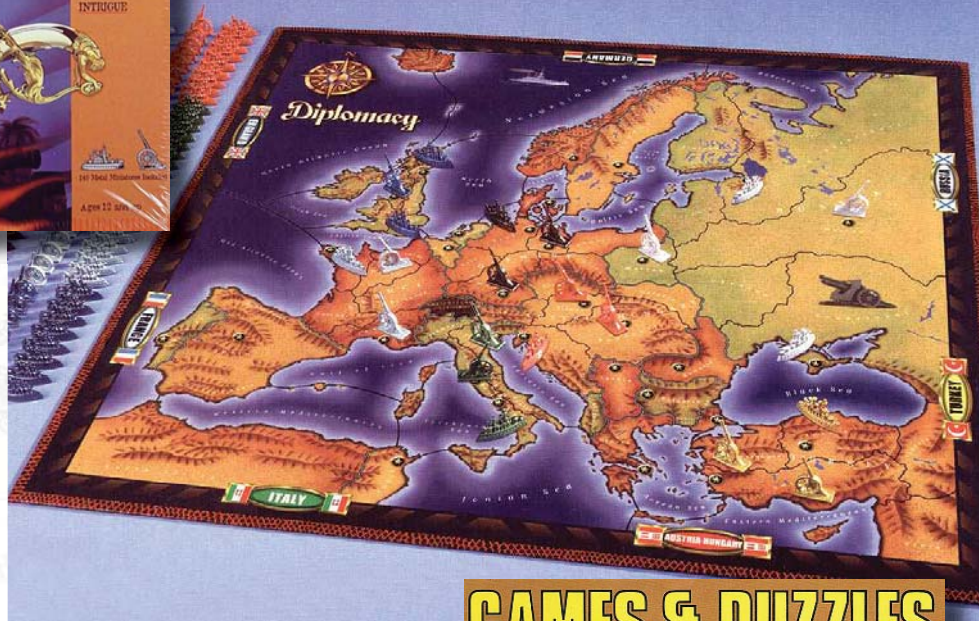
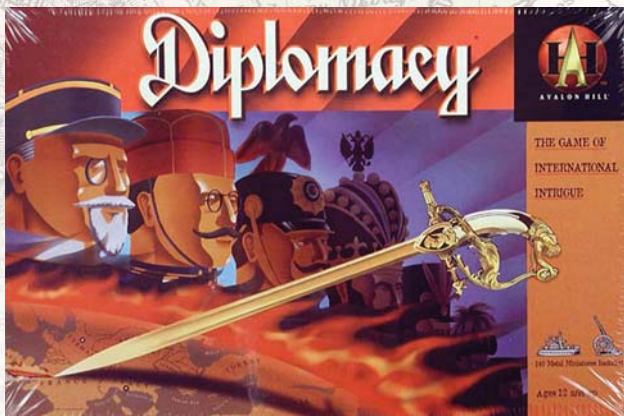
And getting home by 3:30 or 4 in the afternoon also let him help with homework. “He talked to us as if we were adults,” Tatiana said. “We grew up speaking about the history of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and World War I and World War II. And I got through high school math because of him.”

The house was filled with respect for unions, both the NALC and the overall labor movement. Pro-labor sentiments influenced the newspapers the family subscribed to, politics and more.

“Dad was fairly conservative politically in other ways, but when it came

Calhamer in uniform





down to it, I think he would vote for whoever was pro-union. At one time, we didn't have mushrooms or grapes in our house or whatever the United Farm Workers were up to, because he wanted to support that. I grew up being aware of collective bargaining and labor rights and that kind of thing, and to this day I am a labor supporter."

The house also contained correspondence from Diplomacy fans.

"We would hear about different players who had written to him about it," Tatiana said. "We talked about how to play it—though I never did, because I wasn't devious enough—but we knew the background. We grew up with it."

Diplomacy, which is based on the balance of power in pre-WWI Europe, had its origins in an old geography book Calhamer discovered while rummaging in the attic of his boyhood home, according to the *Chicago Tribune*. He was fascinated by the countries and boundaries depicted, such as the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires.

The final inspiration came when a book he read for a Harvard class on the origins of World War I and the back-door intrigue among the Great Powers "brought everything together," Calhamer told *Chicago* magazine. "I thought, 'What a board game that would make!'"

He developed Diplomacy starting in 1954, and Harvard law students quickly took to it. Subsequently hired by the applied research laboratory largely on the basis of his having invented the game, he continued perfecting it.

"His consuming passion was the game and perfecting it and getting it published," Sellenne told *The Postal Record*.

It was initially rejected by several game companies, so Calhamer had 500 copies made in 1959 and placed on toy store shelves in New York, Chicago

and Boston. They sold out within six months. Game maker Avalon Hill bought the rights and Diplomacy soon developed an international following, selling hundreds of thousands of copies. It was reportedly played in the White House by President Kennedy.

The game involves bluffing and backstabbing. As with real-life diplomacy, there often isn't a clear-cut winner, because players often just give up. A quick game can take six hours; sometimes players are at it for days.

Diplomacy, which leaves nothing to chance, is played on a map of pre-WWI Europe with each player—ideally seven—representing one of the Great Powers of the age: England, France, Germany, Italy, Austria-Hungary, Russia and Turkey, according to *The New York Times*.

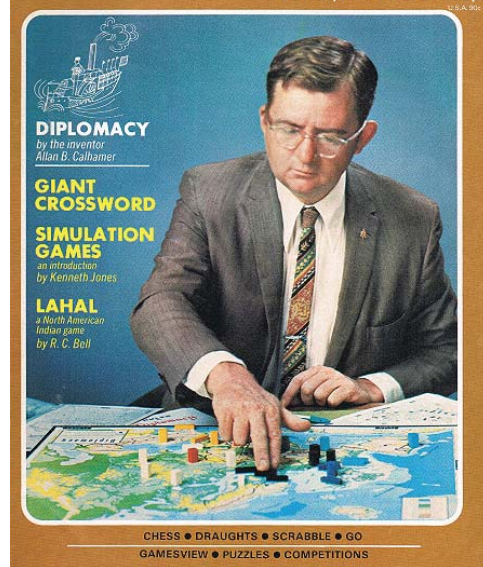
As the *Times* put it, the objective was simple: "...to achieve world domination in as many hours...as it takes."

Last year, Chicago hosted the World Diplomacy Championship and the North American Grand Prix, according to the *Tribune*. Calhamer signed autographs, posed for photos and received a standing ovation after addressing the audience.

Delivering mail evidently appealed to him partly because it involved traits he used elsewhere. As he told *Chicago* magazine, "I was pretty good at sorting mail. You have to be accurate." PR

## GAMES & PUZZLES

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The game of Diplomacy is one of the few board games to not use dice, and was the first commercially published game to be played by mail. Calhamer appeared in the January 1974 issue of *Games & Puzzles* to highlight Diplomacy.